Toronto metro

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Toronto metro

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A WORK OF ARF

Dog lovers wear their hearts on their sleeves

metroNEWS

‘The depth of sorrow’

TRAGEDY

Family killed in holiday cottage fire remembered

A Toronto family of four who died in a fire that levelled their Peterborough-area cottage on Christmas Eve is remembered for being close and loving, by mourners who are still processing the tragedy.

Geoffrey Taber, his wife, Jacquie Gardner, and their two sons, Scott and Andrew died after the blaze destroyed their cottage in the McCrackens Landing area of Stoney Lake.

Geoffrey Taber, Jacquie Gardner and Scott and Andrew CONTRIBUTED

“Geoff Taber was a generous, vibrant and wonderful person,” Dale Ponder, a managing partner at Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt, said in a statement Monday. “There are no words adequate enough to express the depth of sorrow we feel.”

Taber, born in 1960, had a 30-year career with the law firm, and Gardner was also an “exceptional” corporate lawyer at Osler before moving to Altamira Investment Services.

But first and foremost Taber and Gardner were “loving parents to their two remarkable sons.”

One of the boys, Andrew, played hockey with the Toronto Titans minor bantam team, according to the team’s website. The site reported that Andrew was 13 and Scott was 15.

“Andrew was a wonderful and pleasant boy from a strong and loving home. He was a great team member who worked hard to be the best he could be,” said Eric Cella, the team’s general manager, in a statement. “Our community mourns the loss of #92.”

The family lived in Toronto’s Riverdale neighbourhood south of Danforth and Broadview. The couple was planning to permanently move to the cottage when they retired, a neighbour said.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

STREET LEGAL

Homeless youth given help navigating the law

metroNEWS

Bella McWatch was helped by Street Youth Legal Services, which just received base funding from Queen’s Park this fall. BERNARD WEIL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Bike lanes and food trucks: How Toronto got things rolling in 2016

metroNEWS

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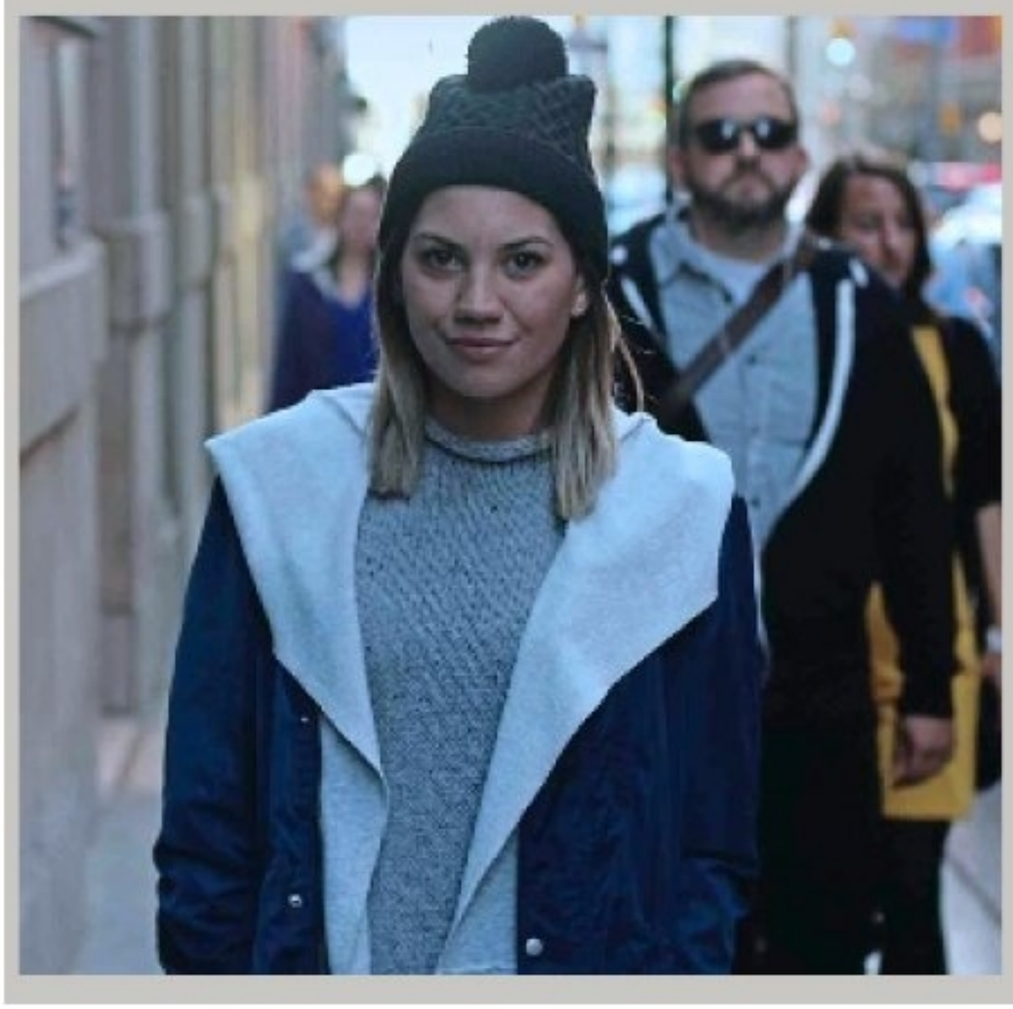
metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Conservationists sound alarm bells for the cheetah as its habitat shrinks.

Humans of Toronto by K. Omar



"A specific person that influences my life on a daily basis is my little brother Kevin. He brings light back to my life. He is 17, and I'm 27, but I've learned different things from him, and he changes my life every day. When I say that, what I mean is that he makes me happier, like almost gives me a purpose? I think that's the best way to put it, it's like he gives me a great purpose because I want to be a good sister. I want to be better, be a good influence on his life. So when I see him take my advice, it makes me feel like a mentor and makes a difference in his life, as well as mine.

Humans of Toronto is K. Omar's social photography project aimed at photographing and talking to people in the city. Selections from her work feature weekly in Metro. See more at Humans of Toronto on Instagram.

Cyclists hail wins

URBAN PLANNING

Bike lanes seen as 'important victories'

Luke Simcoe
Metro | Toronto

Amidst all the carnage on Toronto roads this year, there was one bright spot: cycling.

Only one cyclist has been killed this year — down from four in 2015 — and protected bike lanes and other bike-friendly infrastructure popped up across the city.

"There were a number of really important victories this year that helped send a signal that Toronto streets are for everyone," said Cycle Toronto director Jared Kolb.

Kolb hailed the successful implementation of a bike lane pilot project on Bloor Street — from Shaw to Avenue Road — as a "milestone" for safe cycling in Toronto.

"That was a generational exercise. People have been advocating for bike lanes on Bloor for 40-plus years," he said.

It's not just Bloor Street, either, Kolb said – 2016 was the first full year of having protected cycle tracks on Richmond and Adelaide streets. Council has also approved bike lanes on Woodbine Avenue and will consider them on the Danforth.

"As a city, if we're going to get serious about the growing desire to ride, and ride safely, then the way to do it is build a network of protected bike lanes. I think the literacy around that is growing," Kolb said.

Council also approved a new 10-year cycling plan which doubles annual bike infrastructure spending to $16 million from $8 million. The boost had the "knock-on" effect of bringing the federal government to the table, Kolb said, and Ottawa agreed to pitch in another $43 million between now and 2018.

"We're talking about a transformative level of funding for cycling infrastructure," he said.

The Bloor Street bike lane pilot is one of several victories for cyclists in 2016, says Jared Kolb. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

WEATHER

City sets new Boxing Day record — for heat

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Those waiting outside in line for Boxing Day Monday were treated to some hot deals — and even hotter temperatures.

According to Environment Canada, the 11 C mark reached late Monday afternoon was the warmest it has ever been in the city on Dec. 26. The previous record high for the day, set way back in 1936, was 8.9 C.

The record low? On Boxing Day in 1989, the mercury at Pearson Airport dipped to –21.3 C.

"The funny thing is that we've had warmer Christmases in the past, but not Boxing Days," said Environment Canada meteorologist Mark Seifert, noting temperatures reached nearly 15 C on Christmas of 1983 but plummeted to 0 C the following day.

11°C

The temperature reached in the city yesterday. The highest before that was 8.9 degrees in 1936.

Monday brought erratic freezing rain across the GTA early in the morning. The icy conditions sent drivers across the city sliding into ditches and curbs, and caused delays on several TTC bus routes.

The unexpected reprieve from winter temperatures isn't sticking around. Seifert said Toronto should see a return to seasonal temperatures starting Tuesday and possible some wet snow later in the week.

"It's still a little too far out to forecast, but it's not going to be as warm for New Year's Day," he said.

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PROGRAM

Homeless youth get legal help

Depressed and yearning to connect with her indigenous roots, Bella McWatch, 23, left foster care near Lake Simcoe at age 17 to reunite with her birth mother in Toronto.

But it wasn't "the dream life" she imagined.

She slept on the floor of her mother's cramped apartment for a year and said she constantly clashed with her older brother. She struggled to pay rent when she set out on her own. And she was unable to complete a college certificate program because the institution refused to accommodate her learning needs.

In crisis, McWatch texted her mental-health worker who made a referral to a unique legal service that helps precariously housed youth between the ages of 16 and 24 with legal issues ranging from minor criminal charges, to immigration and access to welfare.

Through Street Youth Legal Services, McWatch filed a human rights complaint against the college in the fall of 2015.

Although the college's recent settlement of the case prevents McWatch from naming the institution or discussing the details of her complaint, she says the experience has been life-altering.

"The process has really helped me to understand myself and my surroundings a lot better," she says. "It has made me a stronger and more independent woman."

New provincial funding through Legal Aid Ontario means the program, run by Justice for Children and Youth since 2000, will no longer have to rely on fundraising and grants. The money is part of $3.3 million earmarked by Legal Aid Ontario to address the needs of vulnerable Ontarians.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

After surviving the 1994 Rwandan genocide, Kizito Musabimana found refuge in Toronto, but quickly fell into a deep depression caused by post-traumatic stress disorder. Now, through his Home Again campaign, he's working to build a special trauma centre for people who've experienced the horrors of war and genocide. He'll be speaking about his experience at this week's Toronto's Untold Stories event.

ALL PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED

Revealing hidden corners of Toronto

SOCIAL EXPERIMENT

Project hopes to get people to look outside their circle

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

A wounded war veteran. A genocide survivor with PTSD. A Syrian refugee living with HIV. A young Pakistani woman looking to reconnect with her culture.

These are some of the people you'll meet at Toronto's Untold Stories, a new, interactive event focused on revealing tales of the city that aren't often told in the mainstream media.

Aanjalie Collure is the woman behind the project. She told Metro she got the idea after being in New York the day Donald Trump was elected president.

The divisive rhetoric she heard afterwards — reverberations of an election campaign that targeted immigrants, Muslims and others — left her "bewildered."

"People didn't know anything about their neighbours. It's as if who they didn't know didn't exist," she said. "It showed me how many people have failed to understand the richness of diversity."

Worse still, Collure says she was reminded of how similar problems can lurk just beneath the surface in Canada. While Americans joked about moving here after the election, or hailed Toronto as a beacon of multiculturalism, she recalled her youth in the city as a Sri Lankan immigrant.

Her native country's struggles were discussed "in the high towers of academia but no one understood the struggles of ordinary immigrants on grassroots level," she said.

It's not much different today, but Collure hopes that by encouraging more Torontonians to hear their neighbours' stories, she can change that.

"All I want is to open up the lines of communications and allow people to get to know life outside of their own circles," she said.

DETAILS

Toronto's Untold Stories takes place Wednesday at Art Square Gallery (334 Dundas St. W., starting at 1 p.m.)

Their untold stories

Ramna Safeer

Ramna Safeer was four years old when her parents immigrated to Canada from Pakistan. She spent years avoiding her parents' culture and traditions in order to "fit into this new, strange world." Now a pre-law and English literature student at Queen's University, she says she wants to recapture what she spent an entire lifetime running from. She's chronicling her journey of self-(re)discovery on CherishChai.com, a blog that showcases the stories of strong, minority women like herself.

Elisheva Passarello

In just two years, Elisheva Passarello went from a four-bedroom house to a homeless shelter, from a "great" job paying over $50,000 to being thousands of dollars in debt. Now, she works as an affordable housing advocate, helping women like her find places to stay. "Homelessness is like a prison of poverty, the lowliest of society mostly forgotten and abandoned," she says.

Bassel McLeash

From Damascus to Egypt and finally Toronto last June, it was a "very bumpy road" for the 29-year-old Syrian refugee. After discovering he was HIV-positive in 2014, he escaped both war and potential persecution for being gay and supporting the local LGBT community. Last summer he marched alongside Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in Toronto's Pride Parade.

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A food truck boom

LICENSING

City took steps in 2016 to reduce red tape — but issues remain

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

When Lily Belete opened the Spicy Ethiopian food truck in August, she hoped Toronto would fall in love with the new menu selections she was serving up.

Five months later, that's exactly what's happened.

"It's a small business but right now we are doing great," she said, noting her four-day a week schedule has helped attract regular customers, some of whom even inquire about her whereabouts in the city.

"Toronto is full of foodies and it's really nice to go out there and serve a variety of food on the streets."

Belete's entry into the industry was given a leg up by the city: 2016 was the year Toronto took steps to reduce the red tape facing food trucks.

Food truck vendors are now allowed to stay in one place for five hours a day, instead of just three. They're also allowed to occupy five square metres of sidewalk, up from 3.5 metres, and can set up shop within 30 metres of a restaurant, rather than 50.

Truck owners can also purchase a permit for six or nine months instead of a full year, in case they don't want to operate during the winter.

The new regulations have led to a food truck boom in Toronto. According to data from the city, 51 new licences were issued this year for mobile vending food trucks, compared to 38 in 2015 and just 16 in 2014.

"The increase has been a trend for the past couple of years and we expect it to continue," said Intiaz Ruffudeen, manager of policy for the city's licensing and standards department.

But that doesn't mean there aren't still challenges for food truck owners. Erica Riley of the BBQ Gourmet food truck said the lack of parking spaces in busy — and thus profitable — areas leads to "a lot of frustration."

"If you want to be at Church and Bloor you have to be there before 6 a.m.," she said, noting regulations wouldn't allow the vendor to stay there until lunchtime.

In an effort to find some financial stability, Riley is following in the footsteps of other food truck owners by concentrating on corporate catering and festival events.

"We've been here since 2012 but we're always losing staff that we could be using for bigger events," she said.

Steffen Marin's Heirloom truck operates all winter long. EDUARDO LIMA/METRO

Winterizing kitchen on wheels no small feat

Steffen Marin knows his clients get hungry during the freezing winter months. So, even after most of the city's food trucks go into hibernation, he continues to pound the pavement. "I mean, there's times when it gets to -30 C and it's pretty rough, but I like to keep working," said Marin, whose Heirloom food truck is among the few that can be found on Toronto streets all year long.

But it takes a lot of preparation to winterize a food truck. Usually, Marin and his partner are the only staff, and they have to cook eight or nine menu items right inside the truck. Sometimes everything freezes, including food and even the propane tanks, and Marin has to pour boiling water on them to warm up. "I want to keep my business growing, so this is the only way," he said.

Matt Lacrette and Harley COLE BURSTON/FOR TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Doggy lovers get tattooey tributes

When Matt Lacrette decided he wanted a sixth tattoo, getting his husky pup Harley inked on his shoulder was an easy decision.

"I just figured, why not get a tattoo of my very best friend in the world, who is my dog," Lacrette, a 25-year-old construction worker, said.

Harley, an almost two-year-old pooch, is a big part of Lacrette's life. The pair go on longboard runs and enjoy hanging out together. His surprisingly lifelike tattoo is a portrait of his dog's happy face with his tongue hanging out and the name Harley emblazoned below.

"Once I got my dog I was like, 'This is what I've been longing for,'" Lacrette said. He said his girlfriend is now also thinking of getting a tattoo of a puppy they recently got.

"I'd say if you're just a really big dog lover and a really big tattoo enthusiast, those are two things that are going to come to your mind."

Ash Timlin, 29, a tattoo artist at Passage Tattoo in Toronto, agrees, but it isn't just dog owners doing it: It's pet owners in general. A lot of her work is of animals — anything from dogs to birds, cats, ferrets and even chinchillas.

She even has a tattoo of a pet ferret she had for eight years on her leg. And though Timlin, who owns two dogs, doesn't have any tattoos of the pups herself yet, she suspects that she eventually will.

"(People) want to get tattoos of things that they like, and I can't think of anything that I like more than my dogs, honestly," Timlin, who's been a tattoo artist for about seven years, said. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Feeling 'bullied' by police

Suzanne Tinglin thought she was fulfilling her civic duty when she walked into her local police station in Toronto's northwest corner last summer.

The registered nurse and York University instructor had received voicemail messages from an officer requesting that she come to 23 division to speak about an investigation at Humber College, where she goes to the gym. When she arrived she was taken into a police interview room, recorded and stunned by an accusation that she stole a laptop from her gym's locker-room. She claims she was "intimidated" by the officer, who she alleged "bullied" her in an attempt to prompt a confession. She was never charged.

"I felt that I wasn't treated appropriately," Tinglin said in a recent interview, denying any involvement in the theft.

She complained to Ontario's Office of the Independent Police Review Director, and the watchdog ruled that the incident warranted investigation and was being referred back to Toronto police's professional standards unit. But the investigator assigned to probe Tinglin's complaint was a detective at 23 division — where the complaint originated.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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Strangers bond at Christmas

NOVA SCOTIA

Social media invite brings 10 to share turkey dinner

A falconer, a university student from Vietnam and a toddler gathered around the Christmas tree at a farmhouse in Nova Scotia for a turkey dinner shared by 10 near strangers who found you don't need to be with family to feel like you belong.

In seasons past, Patty McGill thought of herself as a Christmas "floater" — her children and grandchildren live in Quebec — leaving the 63-year-old matriarch with no one to feed during the holidays except the horses on her farm in the Lunenberg area on Nova Scotia's south shore.

Fearing her Yuletide delicacies would go to waste, McGill decided to share her Christmas dinner with strangers in the same boat as her. She had a friend post an invitation on social media offering a seat at her dinner table to those unable to spend the holidays with their families, and once news outlets caught wind of the gathering, the RSVPs started pouring in.

Strangers with nowhere to go during the holidays gather at a farmhouse in Blockhouse, N.S., hosted by Patty McGill for Christmas Day dinner. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Chuck DeCoste, a falconer who drove in with two people he barely knew, had left his loved ones and his prized bald eagle Hercules, in British Columbia to move to Halifax for work. Inside the farmhouse, Peter de Vries, a volunteer for McGill's therapeutic horseback riding program for children with disabilities, was put to work offering guests beverages as they met each other for the first time in person.

Shortly after breaking the ice, both DeCoste and de Vries found their initial reservations about the event were misguided. "If you're looking for a manifestation of the Christmas spirit, this is a good place to look," said DeCoste. "There is something genuinely beautiful about sharing with other people ... I think one of the beautiful things about Christmas is that people let down their guard a little bit, and something like this is definitely a champion of that idea."

> **There is something genuinely beautiful about sharing with other people.**
> Chuck DeCoste

De Vries said the cross-section of people — young and old, urban and rural, of every origin and creed — made for a "family" of sorts.

Nicole Carter, who drove from Halifax to the farm with her 18-month-old child and Vietnamese university student Hahn Pham in tow, said the crowd formed an "instant family" within minutes of meeting each other, like catching up with long-lost relatives at a family reunion.

McGill said all she had set out to do was cook an old-fashioned turkey dinner for a handful of strangers, but as word of the gathering spread, the idea was adopted in homes across the country. THE CANADIAN PRESS

INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Basic Internet hailed

As grand chief of an organization representing northern Manitoba First Nations, Sheila North Wilson has a lot of experience dealing with spotty Internet and cellphone service.

It's why her group, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc., welcomes the recent decision by the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission to declare broadband Internet access a basic service across the country.

"For day-to-day business and accessibility to the rest of the world, it's high time we received this connectivity in our communities," North Wilson said.

It's big news for Canada's smallest towns, where slow Internet means more than just difficulty sharing cat videos.

Farming organizations have long called for improved internet service.

The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan earlier this year listed broadband Internet and cellphone coverage amongst its issues of concern. THE CANADIAN PRESS

SYRIA

Mass graves, booby traps found in Aleppo

Russia's Defence Ministry said on Monday that its troops had found mass graves in Syria's Aleppo with bodies showing signs of torture and mutilation.

Dozens of bodies have been uncovered, according to Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov. He said some bore gunshot wounds.

Konashenkov also accused rebels, who controlled eastern Aleppo before they were pushed out earlier this month, of laying multiple booby traps and mines across town, endangering the civilian population.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which gathers information on the conflict through local contacts, said on Sunday that at least 63 Syrian soldiers and militiamen had been killed by such booby traps in east Aleppo since the government took control of it from rebels last Thursday. The Observatory said the victims were a mix of demining personnel and soldiers or militiamen looting the districts.

Syrian president Bashar Assad, showing signs of increasing confidence, on Sunday visited a Christian orphanage near the capital Damascus to mark Christmas.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PEACE MARCH

Activists walking to Syria from Berlin

Several hundred peace activists have started what they say will be a months-long protest march from Berlin to war-ravaged Syria to urge an end to the fighting there.

The Civil March for Aleppo set off carrying white flags from Berlin's former Tempelhof Airport on Monday in cloudy, cold and blustery weather.

Organizers said they expect to cover about 20 kilometres a day and to take about 3-1/2 months to walk through Germany, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Greece and Turkey. Some will walk part of the way while others are invited to join along the route.

Demonstrators join the Civil March for Aleppo in Berlin on Monday. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Marchers are being told to provide their own sleeping gear and food.

Participants hope to at least reach Turkey's border with Syria and if possible the Syrian city of Aleppo, the recent scene of heavy fighting and widespread misery.

"It's time to act," the group wrote in a manifesto on its website. "We've had enough of clicking the sad or shocked faces on Facebook and writing, 'This is terrible.'"

Jaber Zaher Alger, a 28-year-old from Syria living in Germany, said that "the march and the people here express their humanity and I want to contribute to it. Other people in the world need to know that the situation in Syria is terrible."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FATAL CRASH

Russia squelches talk that a bomb downed plane

The Kremlin on Monday played down the possibility that a terror attack might have downed a Syria-bound Russian plane, killing all 92 people on board, as the nation observed a day of mourning for the victims, including most members of a world famous military choir.

The Tu-154 owned by the Russian Defence Ministry crashed into the Black Sea early Sunday two minutes after taking off in good weather from the city of Sochi. The plane was carrying members of the Alexandrov Ensemble, often referred to as the Red Army Choir, to a New Year's concert at a Russian military base in Syria.

About 3,500 people, 43 ships and 182 divers have been sweeping a vast crash site for bodies of the victims and debris, and dozens of drones and several submersibles also have been involved in the search. Rescue teams so far have recovered 11 bodies and numerous body fragments, which have been flown to Moscow for identification.

Divers have located parts of the plane's fuselage and other fragments, but the search for the jet's flight recorders will likely prove challenging as they lack underwater locator beacons for easy spotting common in more modern planes.

Officials sought to squelch speculation that the crash might have been caused by a bomb planted on board or a portable air defence missile.

But some aviation experts pointed that the crew's failure to communicate any technical problem and a large area over which fragments of the plane were scattered point at a possible explosion on board.

Evidence of a bombing of a Syria-bound military flight would badly embarrass the Kremlin.

Russian Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov, who oversaw the rescue efforts, said investigators were looking into a possible technical fault or pilot error as the most likely reasons behind the crash.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Floral tributes grow at a pier in Sochi, Russia, on Monday.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TWO-PART

SEASON FINALE

KIM'S CONVENIENCE

SPECIAL TIME

TONIGHT 8

metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Tuesday, December 27, 2016

JANE FRENCH ON THE VIEW FROM THE PAVEMENT

My mind raced after I was hit by a car: How do I feel? Am I OK? Did I land on my right wrist? Does it hurt? Did this really happen to me? This is ridiculous. I'm so close to home.

The afternoon I got hit by a car the sun was shining brightly and Christmas was five days away. I'd just left the YMCA with my friend, Karen. Before the incident, I had a spring in my step as we crossed the street heading toward my favourite Portuguese café for the soup of the day.

The driver of the car was distraught. She had been making a right turn, slowly, and somehow didn't see us. She stopped in the intersection, blocking the College streetcar and came over to apologize.

She seemed genuinely remorseful but I was in shock and angry that a stupid, random "accident" left me flat on my back, with tire treads on my right boot and dignity definitely missing in action. A man offered to help me get up but I declined. This was my moment to direct an arsenal of questions for all the distracted drivers on the road at her: "Are you drunk? On drugs? Were you texting?"

"No, no," she replied. "My baby is in the car. I just had lunch with a friend. I hate driving in downtown Toronto. I'm so, so sorry." Four witnesses came forward as I was lying on the street, including Julie, owner of a local gift shop, who recognized me.

My mind was racing. How do I feel? Am I OK? Did I land on my right wrist? Does it hurt? Did my boot get trapped under her front wheel for a few seconds? Did this really happen to me? This is ridiculous. I'm so close to home. I don't need this. What am I supposed to do now? Aren't strangers great?

Someone asked if I was hurt. "I don't think so," I replied. Did I need to go to the hospital? Horrors I thought. "No, not necessary."

By now I was standing, brushing grit off my coat, pants, gloves and bag. Shouldn't I get the driver's contact information in case I'm not OK tomorrow? What's her licence-plate number? Make of car? I gave her a pen and some paper. I was too shaken to take down the info myself.

Then one of the witnesses changed her tone. "You just want to get money off the driver. Tomorrow you'll claim you've got whiplash!"

Her accusations hit me almost as hard as the car. I started to feel teary. Is this phase four — after shock, anger and relief comes an emotional release? Am I glad to be alive? Relieved that at least the driver is co-operating? Glad to have a friend at my side? This was tipping towards the surreal.

Jennifer, the driver, was offering to buy us lunch when Julie, the store owner, returned. "Jane, I called 911 before you said not to bother. I hung up but they called me back. You need to tell them you don't want to go to the hospital." As she handed me the phone, an ambulance arrived.

There was something immensely comforting about being escorted into the ambulance. In the middle of a series of routine questions from the EMS guy, I suddenly had my epiphany. "Oh my god, I'm a statistic. I'm another pedestrian hit by car in Toronto!"

In a year in which a horrifying number of people have been hit and killed by cars in Toronto, I was one of the lucky ones. My heart rate was normal, my blood pressure was slightly elevated (understandable according to the paramedic) and, other than a sore wrist, I was going to walk away from this incident and live to see another day.

As I warmed up in the ambulance, the "what ifs" surfaced in my head: what if we had crossed at another intersection? What if she'd been driving faster? What if Karen and I had headed in another direction for coffee instead of soup? What if I'd broken bones or had a concussion just before Christmas? What if our daughter living in the U.K. had gone to the Christmas Market in Berlin the day before instead of one in Copenhagen last week?

Life is full of "what ifs" governed by chance and circumstance, accidents or incidents and plans that take a detour to the unexpected.

When I replay the encounter, it's like a short film in slow motion. I'm relieved I can recall how it ends as I type these words with only a slightly sore wrist. I'm happy to report that the soup was delicious.

A pedestrian crosses the intersection of Queens Park and University on Dec. 14. Pedestrian deaths continue to plague Toronto at an alarming rate. LANCE MCMILLAN/FOR METRO

In a year in which a horrifying number of people have been hit and killed by cars in Toronto, I was one of the lucky ones.

Jane French is a museum administrator with the City of Toronto. She recently co-curated "When the Beatles Rocked Toronto" at the Market Gallery. She lives, walks, cycles and drives in Toronto.

Tie a ribbon on my property tax bill, because it's a gift

TORY'S TORONTO
Matt Elliott

In a season defined by giving and getting, it feels opportune to take a moment to reflect on what your city will be asking from you in the new year.

For property taxes in Toronto, the request works out to — are you ready for this? — an additional eight bucks a month.

Seriously, that's all. Eight dollars per household. It turns out when you cut through all the complexity attached to property taxes and municipal budgets, the dollar amounts are very small.

And so the proposed two per cent residential property tax increase in Toronto's preliminary 2017 budget — set to be approved in February — translates to an increase of $96 annually on the average tax bill. Eight dollars a month.

Of that, just $4.60 monthly will go to fund ongoing city expenditures. Another $1.16 will go to capital projects to build transit and housing.

Most of the remainder is tied to a longstanding policy to reduce the burden of property taxes on businesses. There's also some property tax revenue that goes to education, but the city has nothing to do with that.

And remember: eight dollars is the average. If your home is valued at less than about $587,000, you will pay less.

And this year, as a long overdue provincially mandated gift to renters, multi-residential apartments won't see any property tax increase at all. Landlords next year will have no budgetary tax increase to pass on to tenants.

Another reminder: these small increases will come on top of an overall property tax burden that is far lower than the GTA average by every measure.

I'm giving you all these numbers to make two points.

First, this is the easiest and best way to understand Toronto's budget debate. So much of the city budget coverage is dominated by arcane percentages and dollar figures in the millions of dollars.

But translate those budget figures down to their monthly impact and we're talking small change.

Providing a new child care space? Maybe one cent a month. Additional track maintenance to reduce the number of TTC issues that cause delays? Add another dime. Better park maintenance? That'll be two cents, pal.

When your local politicians are squabbling about funding shelter spaces or student nutrition programs — literally life-or-death issues — they are usually talking about pennies. A little goes a long way.

Which brings me to my second point.

For many of us, even though we gripe endlessly, living in this city is a bargain. Next year, my eight bucks will buy mobility, shelter, community and opportunity. These dollars and cents get us a city that I love, even with all its damn flaws. So tie a ribbon on my tax bill — I'm happy to get it.

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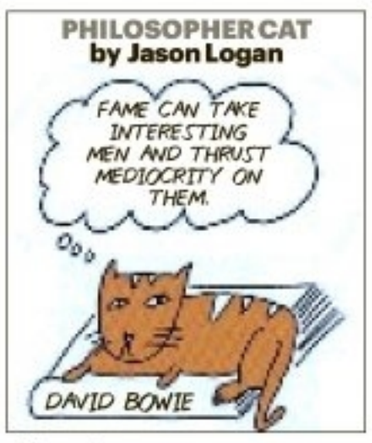

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Your essential daily news

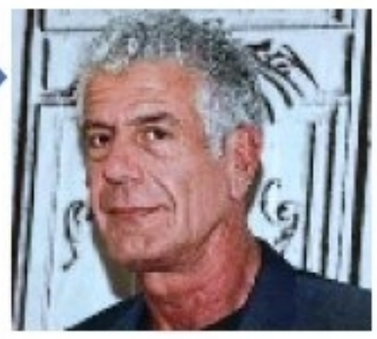
Blac Chyna snubbed? New mom didn't get a stocking at Kardashian Christmas gathering

CREATIVES SHARE MOST MEANINGFUL LIFE METAPHORS

NEWSMAKERS REVEAL WHAT METAPHOR BEST FITS THEIR PERSONALITY AND KEEPS THEM GOING THROUGH HAPPY AND HARD TIMES. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

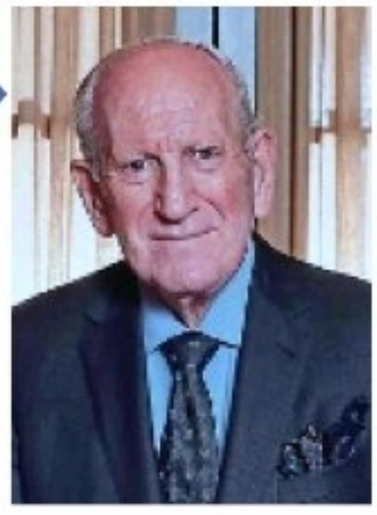
Life is a camera. Focus on what's important, develop from the negatives, always try to capture the good times, and if things don't turn out, you can always take another shot.
ACTOR MEGHAN MARKLE

Life is a burning building. You save what you can.
CHEF AND AUTHOR ANTHONY BOURDAIN



Life is an echo. I was raised by hippies who believe in karma. I do believe that what we put out comes back to us, which is part of why I believe so strongly in being kind. We can amplify any action, positive or negative, by reciprocating.
WRITER AND ARTIST TEVA HARRISON

Life is a classroom. It's an ongoing experience in learning. Regardless of age, watch and learn from young people. Get to understand their music, means of communication and lifestyle choices.
CLOTHIER HARRY ROSEN



In 1993 George Michael performed at the Concert of Hope to mark World AIDS Day on Dec. 2 at London's Wembley Arena. The singer, who died on Sunday at age 53, is being remembered for his charity work as well as his music. GILL ALLEN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

George Michael praised for activism, donations

OBITUARY

Pop singer is remembered for supporting AIDS victims

Fans are mourning the death of pop star George Michael as British charities praise his generosity.

The singer's death was announced late Sunday night. Many paid tribute on Facebook and Twitter and others cited years of good works that received little publicity.

He was lauded Monday for helping many British organizations including Macmillan Cancer Support, Childline, and the Terrence Higgins Trust, which helps support AIDS victims.

Jane Barron from the Trust said Michael made many donations and gifts, including the royalties of his Don't Let the Sun Go Down on Me duet with Elton John in 1991.

Childline founder Esther Rantzen said Michael gave royalties from his 1996 hit Jesus To A Child to the charity, which offers phone counselling for young people.

She said he was extraordinarily generous and "determined" to avoid publicity about his donations.

Michael died at his home in Goring, England. His publicist, Cindi Berger, said he had not been ill. His family issued a statement through Thames Valley Police saying that he "passed away peacefully at home over the Christmas period.

"The family would ask that their privacy be respected at this difficult and emotional time. There will be no further comment at this stage."

Police issued a statement calling the death "unexplained but not suspicious" and that "a post mortem will be undertaken in due course."

Michael enjoyed immense popularity early in his career as a teenybopper idol, delivering a series of hits such as Wake Me Up Before You Go-Go and Freedom. As a solo artist, he developed into a more serious singer and songwriter, lauded by critics for his tremendous vocal range. He sold well over 100 million albums, earned numerous Grammy awards, and recorded duets with Aretha Franklin and Elton John among others.

Throughout his career, his drug use and taste for risky sex brought him into frequent brushes with the law, most famously in 1998 when he was arrested for public lewdness in Los Angeles. Yet, he managed to turn the incident into fodder for a popular song that poked fun at his behaviour, and his acknowledgment of his homosexuality at that time made him even more popular with his fans.

Michael, with startling good looks and an easy stage manner, formed the duo WHAM! with his school friend Andrew Ridgeley in the early 1980s. Helped by MTV, which was an emerging music industry force at the time, they became popular in North America with Michael, as lead singer, usually the focal point.

He started his solo career shortly before WHAM! split, with the release of the megahit single Careless Whisper, making a seamless transition.

His first solo album, 1987's Faith, sold more 20 million copies, and he enjoyed several hit singles including the raunchy I Want Your Sex, which was helped immeasurably by a provocative video.

The song was controversial not only because of its explicit nature, but also because it was seen as encouraging casual sex and promiscuity at a time when the AIDS epidemic was deepening. Michael and his management tried to tamp down this point of view by having the singer write Explore Monogamy on the leg and back of a model in the video.
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

REACTION

Many celebrities took to social media to express their grief and share their memories of the pop icon. U.K. singer Sam Smith wrote, Michael was "one of the most magical, talented, bravest & important figures in music & life as I know it. I would not be the artist I am if it wasn't for you, @GeorgeMichael."

metro SPORTS

The NBA says two calls were missed — both aiding the Cavs — in the final moments of Cleveland's 109-108 win over Golden State on Sunday

De Grasse races way to coveted honour

DAMIEN MEYER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

CP MALE ATHLETE OF THE YEAR

Markham sprinter won three medals at Rio Olympics

The smile was priceless, a rare spontaneous moment in the Olympic pressure cooker that will go down as one of the most enduring images of the Rio Summer Games.

Andre De Grasse had cruised up alongside Usain Bolt in their 200-metre semifinal and flashed the Jamaican giant a wide grin. The slender, five-foot-nine De Grasse could have been the precocious little brother challenging the six-foot-five big brother. Bolt couldn't help but crack a smile.

It may as well have been a race between just two. Behind them, six other sprinters strained to keep up.

In his Olympic debut, and just his second true season in the sport, the 22-year-old dared to race the greatest sprinter of all time, and his youthful charm had Canadian fans smitten.

De Grasse, who raced to three Olympic medals in Rio, has been voted the winner of the Lionel Conacher Award as the Canadian Press male athlete of 2016.

"I just try to have a lot of fun when I'm competing because I know how hard it is during training," De Grasse said. "And there are always going to be ups and downs with sports, but I have to remember to always just be motivated because I know I inspire a lot of people, and I want to show them it's a fun sport, I want to lift up the sport, especially in Canada."

Andre De Grasse finished second to Usain Bolt in the 200 metres at the Rio Olympics. FRANCK FIFE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

VOTING

The breakdown of the votes from sports editors and broadcasters across Canada:

- Andre De Grasse (43)
- Sidney Crosby (18)
- Derek Drouin (2)
- Connor McDavid (1)
- Milos Raonic (1)

The Markham sprinter earned 43 votes (66 per cent) in the annual survey of editors and broadcasters from across the country.

De Grasse won silver in the 200 metres in Rio and bronze in both the 100 and 4x100-metre relay.

"No Canadian has ever done that," said CBC's Scott Russell. "De Grasse competes in the deepest of all sports. He competed against the greatest sprinter of all time. In addition, he helped erase a 20-year-old Canadian record in the 4x100-metre relay which had been held by a squad anchored by Donovan Bailey and which resulted in Olympic Gold in 1996."

What made De Grasse's feat truly remarkable, according to coach Stu McMillan, is that it came in just his second year of solid training at the end of a season that saw several significant life changes. He turned pro at this time last season, signing a historic $11.25-million US deal with Puma. He also left the University of Southern California to move to Phoenix to train with McMillan and the Altis program.

"That he was able to come out of that season with all of those things on top of him, and still have three Olympic medals is pretty incredible really," McMillan said.

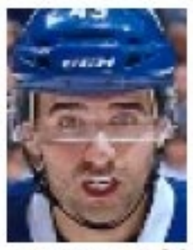
De Grasse recently completed his sociology degree at USC, keeping a promise he made to his mom. He celebrated his graduation with a couple of friends in Las Vegas, and is now back in Phoenix training for the upcoming season. THE CANADIAN PRESS

MAPLE LEAFS

Kadri's 2-way play turning heads

The Maple Leafs' Nazem Kadri has rarely ranked in voting for any of the NHL's individual awards through his eight seasons in the league.

But back in 2012-13, when he was still considered a rush-style player, he finished 38th in the voting for the Frank J. Selke Trophy, awarded annually to the league's top defensive player.



Nazem Kadri GETTY IMAGES

Today, with Kadri getting attention for his improved two-way play, the chances are good he will finish much higher in Selke voting when it's decided on at the end of the regular season.

More than ever, the Leafs centre has embraced the defensive side of his game; part of the narrative there has been rooted in Leafs coach Mike Babcock and president Brendan Shanahan, who challenged him more than a year ago to raise the level of his game.

While he hasn't been as dominating as some of the recent Selke winners — players like Anze Kopitar and Patrice Bergeron — Kadri's performance and analytics against top opposition ranks in the top 10 or better among NHL forwards.

Leafs fans still talk about how he helped contain Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid in one of two meetings this season.

But Kadri has also shut down the likes of Sidney Crosby, Tyler Johnson, Claude Giroux and David Backes.

Kadri will be the first to tell you he's not focusing on individual awards. But his continued development as a two-way player will be a theme for the Leafs moving into the second half of the season. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

CHAPOCOENSE TRAGEDY

Probe finds human errors led to crash

A series of human errors caused an airliner to run out of fuel and crash in Colombia last month, killing 71 people including most of the Chapocoense soccer team, aviation authorities said on Monday.

Colombia's Civil Aeronautics agency concluded in its investigation that the plan for the flight operated by Bolivia-based charter company LaMia did not meet international standards. Among the errors made were the decisions to let the plane take off without enough fuel to make the flight safely and then to not stop midway to refuel. The pilot also did not report the plane's emergency until it was too late, it said.

Neither the company nor Bolivian authorities should have allowed the plane to take off with the flight plan submitted, said Freddy Bonilla, air safety secretary for Colombia's aviation authority.

The plane crashed on Nov. 28. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PREMIER LEAGUE

United flips for acrobatic goal

Manchester United's Henrikh Mkhitaryan strikes the ball with his heel for a highlight-reel goal on Monday. OLI SCARFF/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Henrikh Mkhitaryan scored an acrobatic back flick to wrap up Manchester United's 3-1 win over Sunderland in the English Premier League on Saturday, ensuring a miserable return to Old Trafford for former United manager David Moyes.

On as a second-half substitute, Mkhitaryan met Zlatan Ibrahimovic's right-wing cross with a flicked finish with the heel of his right foot that flew into the corner in the 86th minute.

Ibrahimovic also set up the opening goal for Daley Blind in the 39th before scoring his 16th goal of the season in the 82nd after being played through by Paul Pogba.

Sunderland's consolation was scored by Fabio Borini in stoppage time.

Monday marked the opening batch of games in the first of three Premier League rounds over the festive period. All the title-chasing teams won — Chelsea beat Bournemouth 3-0, Manchester City also came out on top 3-0 over Hull, and Arsenal defeated West Bromwich 1-0. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

5

The Leafs rank fifth in the league in Corsi — shot attempt differential while at even strength.

Sharpening his mental edge

WORLD JUNIORS

Goalie has reputation for thinking his way to success

When Carter Hart was named the starting goalie for Team Canada's world junior opener against Russia on Monday, it confirmed what many observers of the 18-year-old have remarked on the past few years: Hart is a thinking goalie's goaltender.

His success — he's a second-round pick of the Philadelphia Flyers in last June's draft and is arguably the top junior goalie in the world — has been achieved through mental focus as well as refining his on-ice techniques and play.

Ever since he was ranked either first or second among draft eligible goalies by NHL Central Scouting last season, Hart's mental preparations have come under closer scrutiny.

Hart relies, in part, on John Stevenson's Zone Performance Psychology of Edmonton, which is near his home in Sherwood Park.

Canada goaltender Carter Hart makes a save on Finland's Arttu Ruotsalainen during exhibition action in Montreal on Dec. 19. GRAHAM HUGHES/THE CANADIAN PRESS

That became notable among observers who track draft eligible players, in large part because Stevenson has worked with Washington Capitals' all-star goalie Braden Holtby for more than a decade.

Hart's involvement with Stevenson goes back eight years, and according to his teammates on Team Canada, Hart "thinks" his way to better performances as much as working out the kinks through practice.

"Every game that he thinks he wasn't as good as he could be, he comes back and just plays better," said Team Canada defenceman Noah Juulsen, a teammate of Hart's with Everett of the Western Hockey League.

"He really focuses on thought process a lot … he's done a great job in net for us in Everett and here (Team Canada)."

While mental focus is nothing new to sports, or goaltending, Stevenson zones in on developing the brain to overcome personal limits, from the emotional to physical, so the athlete can continually break through performance barriers.

There are several A-list junior goalies either in this tournament or in Canadian junior hockey, including Team Canada's Connor Ingram, and Mike DiPietro, Jeremy Brodeur and Dylan Wells of the OHL. But it's Hart who receives high praise for his intelligence as much as his talent.

"Carter's got some special qualities," Flyers GM Ron Hextall, a former NHL goalie, told NHL.com prior to Philadelphia selecting Hart 48th overall.

"His ability, that's one thing. But mentally, everything that we talked about, our scouts saw. The mental part of the game, he's very strong. He's a real student of the game. He wants to get better, asks a lot of questions."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Go to metronews.ca for coverage of the Monday night's Canada-Russia game.

SCORES

Czechs take down defending champions

Michael Spacek scored with 1:18 left in regulation time to lift the Czech Republic to a 2-1 victory over defending champion Finland at the world junior hockey championship on Monday night.

Spacek, a Winnipeg Jets prospect with the WHL's Red Deer Rebels, fired a shot through traffic from just inside the blue line that went inside the post to decide what was a tight-checking opening game of the tournament for both teams.

U.S. romps over Latvia

Clayton Keller scored twice as the United States overcame a slow start to beat Latvia 6-1.

The Americans finished the game with five unanswered goals.

Sweden rolls past Denmark

Alexander Nylander scored twice and 16-year-old Rasmus Dahlin had a goal and an assist and Sweden routed Denmark 6-1.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

SPONSORED CONTENT — RAPTORS 905

RAPTORS 905 ROAR INTO A HOLIDAY HOME STAND

Hot on the heels of the team's historic school day game Dec. 20 at the Air Canada Centre, the Raptors 905 bring some holiday cheer to their cheering fans through a late December home stand at Mississauga's Hershey Centre.

The team faces the Delaware 87ers, an affiliate of the NBA's Philadelphia 76ers, tonight at 7:30. On Thursday, they match up against the Maine Red Claws, whose lineup includes Boston Celtics rookie Demetrius Jackson. Then on Jan. 2, the team plays the Erie Bayhawks, an affiliate of the Orlando Magic.

In just their second year in the league, the Raptors 905 are having their best season yet, with a record winning streak and a dominant lineup that includes former Denver Nugget Axel Toupane, named the D-League's Most Improved Player last season. The team has thrived under the tutelage of head coach Jerry Stackhouse, himself a two-time NBA All-Star and former Sports Illustrated Player of the Year.

For fans who can't get enough courtside action, Raptors 905 Holiday Packs — tickets for up to six games, including the NBA D-League Showcase — start at just $48.

The Showcase brings all 22 teams to town for a series of games at the Hershey Centre starting Jan. 18, giving fans a chance to catch the game's top prospects before they become stars in the NBA. Get tickets for the team's remaining games at Raptors905.com/tickets.

For schedules, merch and more, visit raptors905.dleague.nba.com.

Former NBA player Axel Toupane is part of a Raptors 905 lineup that's enjoying the best season in franchise history. CONTRIBUTED

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Festive Slow Cooker Gingerbread Oats

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

This smells like the holidays, reminds you of a cookie and makes itself in your slow cooker. It's exactly the kind of thing your family will enjoy. Have a very happy holidays and New Year. We wish you and your family all the best in love, health and food.

Ready in 7 hours
Prep time: 5 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 1/4 cup steel cut oats
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups water
- 1 Tbsp molasses
- 3 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp chia seeds
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp salt

Directions

1. Add oats, milk, water, molasses, brown sugar, chia, ginger, vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and salt into your slow cooker. Give it all a stir.

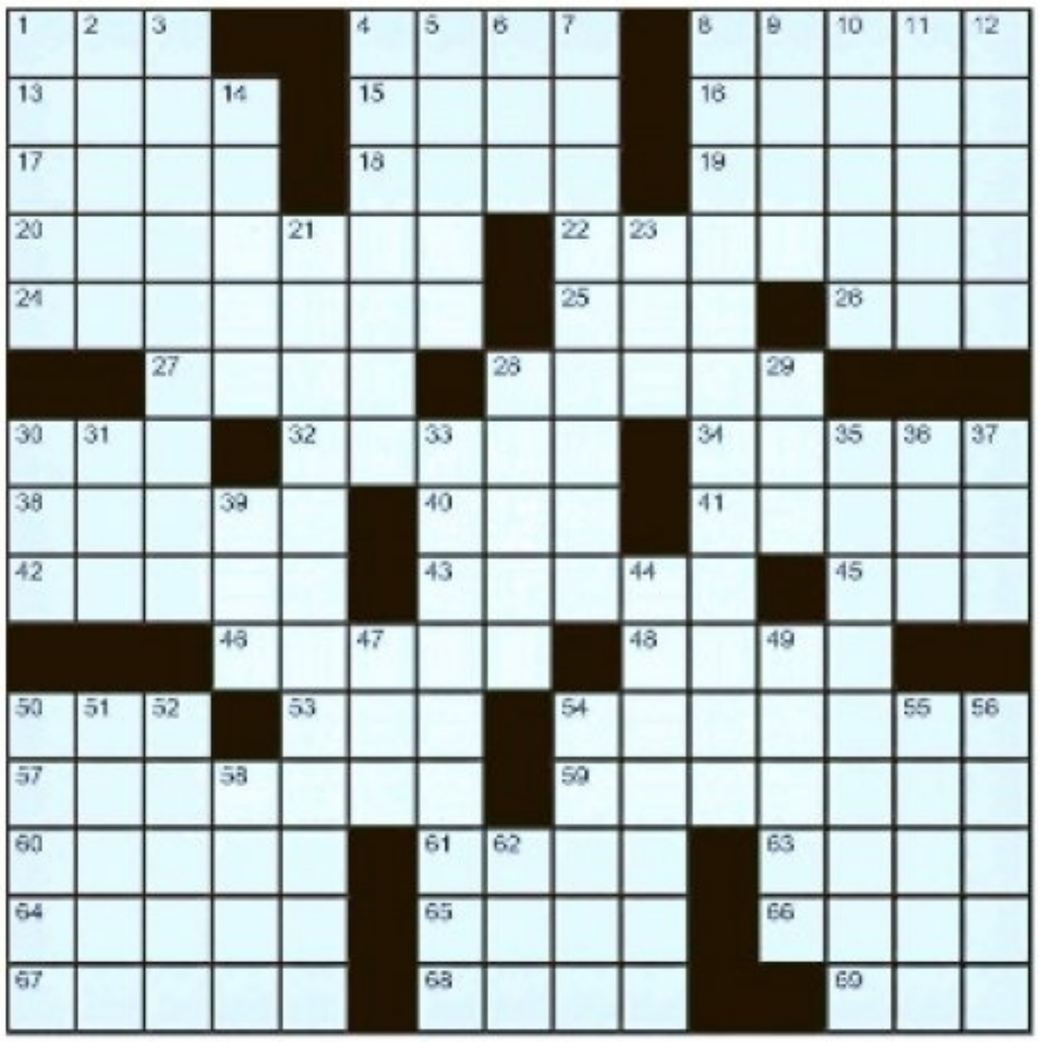
2. Cover and cook on low for 6 to 7 hours.

3. Scoop oatmeal into bowls from slow cooker, pour in splash of milk and garnish with toasted coconut and raspberries.

FOR MORE MEAL IDEAS, VISIT SWEETPOTATOCHRONICLES.COM

CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. AGO = __ Gallery of Ontario
4. Mr. LaBeouf
8. Quackers
13. English prison
15. Indianapolis footballer
16. Ms. Massey of "International Lady" (1941)
17. Cosmetic surgery procedure, commonly
18. Sacred looped cross of ancient Egypt
19. South†Korea's capital
20. Super Dave __ (Stuntman character for comedian Bob Einstein)
22. Takes when given
24. Diminishes
25. "Surprise!"
26. Adriatic __
27. Mr. Berkus, Oprah protege
28. Amassed bills: 2 wds.
30. Omega-3 fatty acid, e.g.
32. Bear, in Latin
34. Paris Hilton's sister
38. To come, in French
40. US television network
41. "__ firma!" (Sailor's ashore shout)
42. Mary of "Newhart"
43. Debussy's "__ de Lune"
45. '_' __ in Iberville
46. Church topper
48. Actor, Dean __
50. Bill the Cat's exclamation in comics!
53. Sort of deposit
54. Madonna's maiden name
57. Wearing a warm wrap
59. Rorschach Test component
60. Rice/seaweed roll
61. French film
63. Single-named singer of 2007 tune "Grace Kelly"
64. Moral principle
65. Betting likelihoods
66. Miffy mood
67. Like the Alouettes or the Canucks or the Jays, say
68. Methods
69. '_' __ in Edmundston

DOWN
1. Radiant
2. Heighten
3. Bigwig: 2 wds.
4. Grocery checkout device
5. Perfects
6. Class
7. Alberta river
8. Big sales on clothing can be found on one: 2 wds.
9. Peter Fonda beekeeper character
10. Poultry places
11. "__ Rockne, All American" (1940)
12. Sauce with tortilla chips
14. "__! _ flake!" (It's starting to snow!)
21. Store's important information for after-Christmas customers: 2 wds.
23. Bamboozle
28. Russia's currency
29. "American __" (1999)
30. Monogram of the fashion designer famous for wrap dresses
31. "In __ Shoes" (2005)
33. Immune-to-criticism person: 2 wds.
35. Victorian undergarment
36. Isthmus of __ (Malay Peninsula part)
37. '_' __ in Yukon
39. Entries
44. Frigidity
47. Galway's land, for short
49. Long-range weapons, commonly
50. Valuable virtue
51. Plane-jumper's need
52. Buckwheat cereal served warm
54. Supermodel Ms. Crawford
55. Finland-based technologies company
56. Les __-Unis (United States, in French)
58. Lark
62. __ Red (Apple variety)

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS Your daily horoscope by Francis Drake

Aries March 21 - April 20
Today you'll make a great impression on everyone, especially bosses and VIPs. This is because you are upbeat, confident and full of energy! Go after what you want.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Any kind of travel will appeal to you today, because you want a change of scenery. You want to do anything that will expand your world and let you discover something new.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You are in an excellent position for having important discussions about inheritances and shared property. You'll have no trouble defending your own best interests. Just do it!

Cancer June 22 - July 23
You can learn something about your style of relating to partners and close friends today. You also can learn something about their style of relating to you.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
This is a productive day for you. You have energy to burn, plus you are feeling motivated. Plan on getting a lot done, especially at work.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Today is a lovely, playful day. Enjoy sports events, playful activities with children, romantic escapades and any kind of social diversion. Choose the company of someone you like.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
You have strong opinions about what you want to achieve at home today. This is why others will listen to you during important family discussions. Make plans for visiting relatives.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
This is a powerful day for those of you in sales, marketing, teaching, acting and anything that requires excellent communication skills. You are confident and eloquent!

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Your money skills are excellent today. Look for ways to boost your income or perhaps get a better job. Trust your moneymaking ideas.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Today the Sun is in your sign, fired up by Mars. This means you have energy to burn! It also means that you will be heard, no matter what you do or what you say.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
Work alone or behind the scenes today, because this is how you can get the most done. It's very easy for you to be laid-back, charming and diplomatic right now.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
In any group situation today, you will be powerful. Unconsciously, you will take charge and people will follow you. "Forward ho!"

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

			3		4			9
		1			2			
	3	7		5				
6			1				9	3
		9		8		2		
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				2		9	4	
			5			3		
1			8		7			

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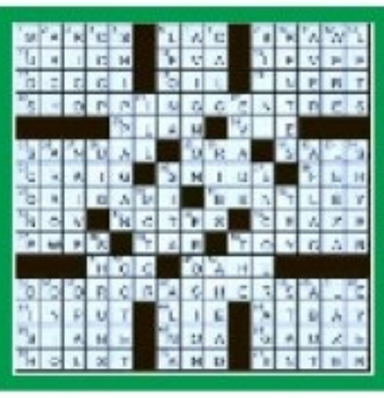

4	6	3	2	9	5	7	1	8
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6	7	2	5	1	9	8	3	4
9	8	5	3	4	7	1	2	6
3	4	7	6	5	2	9	8	1
2	1	6	9	8	3	4	7	5
8	5	9	4	7	1	2	6	3

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